

NAVAL EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TRAINING AT EGLIN AFB, FL

With the closure of the Vieques training area, the Marine Corps has been actively engaged in developing alternative training areas for naval expeditionary forces on the US East Coast. Eglin Air Force Base in Florida provides a near-term pre-deployment training capability for East coast Expeditionary Strike Groups (ESG)/Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable), and has the potential to be a long-term solution. The training concept envisions up to two ten-day periods per year for ESG/MEU training.

The first training exercise at Eglin was an ESG/MEU Exercise conducted from 8-17 December 2003. This exercise was led by elements of the 22d MEU (SOC), and incorporated unit-level live fire and maneu-

ver training, tested the Marine Corps offload plan, and included integrated operations with the US Air Force Special Operations Command.

Eglin AFB's size, proximity to the sea, and layout provide the "battle space" for current and emerging capabilities. Eglin currently has the range space to execute company-level live fire and maneuver training and combined-arms live fire, albeit without live sea-to-land naval surface fire support. While Eglin has the potential for enhanced live-fire and maneuver training, this capability will require a significant investment to upgrade and develop existing facilities. Our near-term focus has been the successful conduct of the December 2003 ESG/MEU exercise.